

BRAWLER'S ALLEY

ISSUE 02 . AUG 22

BROK

THE INVESTIGATOR

Game Review & Dev Interview

The First
Point'n Click
Beat 'em Up
Ever!

PULLING NO PUNCHES

Game Review & Dev Interview

UNDERLING UPRISING

Dev Interview

RIVER CITY SAGA

Game Review



FIRST SCREENSHOTS OF THE
HUGE UPDATE
COMING LATER THIS YEAR

FIRST
LOOK

BRAWLER'S ALLEY



WARNING

MAYHEM BRAWLER

An urban fantasy themed beat 'em up that brings back the 90s arcade vibe to present day. With comic book style art and kick-ass soundtracks, it offers an amazing experience that you can tackle solo or as co-op with friends while defining the next step in the story with your choices.



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COVER STORY

BROK, THE INVESTIGATOR

A point 'n click game with beat 'em up mechanics that will put your fingers and your smarts to the test. Follow Brok, The InvestiGator while he tries to solve the case of his life while fighting giant rats and evil robots!

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PULLING NO PUNCHES

When people do not comply with safety measures that can save mankind from a terrible pandemic the only solution, obviously, is hit the streets and punch the face of those people. Follow the adventure of four very angry girls in this contagious beat 'em up.

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New Character? Check! New Modes? Check! New Moves? Check! Take a look on our exclusive look on the new amazing update for Tanuki Creative's Jitsu Squad. There's a lot of new content coming pretty soon and you won't miss it!

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RIVER CITY SAGA: THREE KINGDOMS

Welcome to ancient China! But don't get too comfortable because the Yellow Turbans are at our walls and they aren't happy! Embark in a epic adventure with the iconic characters of the River City franchise and help unite China in this retelling of the Three Kingdoms story.

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2000 THANKS!

When we first thought about this magazine, it appeared a little far fetched to us. I mean, starting a digital magazine in 2022 talking exclusively about beat 'em ups sounded like a fun exercise that probably would reach 100 people, 500 tops. Afterall, in the age of the internet, who wants to read a magazine when Youtube is just a click away?

Well, it happens that more than 2000 of you wanted something like this and we couldn't be more humbled. That's why we would like to personally thank you. Every single one of you who downloaded, shared, commented, sent feedback and some of you, amazingly, even supported the magazine financially. All of you, with no exception, have our most sincere gratitude.

Of course, our work here isn't done yet. We have big plans for the magazine, but we need your help to do it. Yes, we heard you and we know many of you want a printed version. We are looking into it. With being based in Brazil, the logistics to print, store and ship the magazine is way bigger (and expensive) than what we anticipated. So due to this, we are creating a partnership with Abryt Media, a US based company, to help us with this. Yes, Brawler's Alley will be published and distributed directly from the US early next year and, for the collectors among you, the past issues will be available for purchase on demand.

Unfortunately, we can't give you more details about this deal yet, but rest assured that we are working hard over here to make it happen. The digital version is planned to continue free of charge for everyone because our goal here is to make beat 'em ups popular, demystify the genre, help new players to find the perfect game and even help new developers to make

their game better.

We need your help for this. 2000+ readers was an amazing feat that we sincerely weren't expecting, but for the magazine to thrive, we will need a lot more readers. We need you to share the magazine with everyone! Post on your social media. Tell your friends, your neighbors, your dog, your cat so we can get more readers to make the magazine commercially viable. As many of you are already aware, this publication is a "two person job," ran between my wife and I. She is responsible for everything you see here and on the site, while I do the research, reviews, previews, interviews, etc. Although this doesn't have a direct cost, we are putting a lot of time into it and because of that we aren't able to work in our regular jobs as we were before starting all of this. To reduce the amount of work we have and the time cost, we need more people working with us and, to do this, we need to pay them. Since the magazine is free, the only source of income we can have is placing ads in each issue. But don't worry, we don't want to fill the magazine with ads and put the content in second place. Nope! We only need a few ads per issue to keep the magazine alive and to hire more people to helpus make it even better.

But this is for the future. For now, we want you to enjoy our latest issue. And, of course, to thank each and everyone that, no matter how, supported the magazine in this past month. Once again:

Thank you. You are awesome!

Ricardo Savino

TAKING BEAT'EM UPS TO NEW HEIGHTS



THE FLYING KICK
NETWORK



The Flying Kick Network is an independent gaming media specialized in beat 'em ups from all eras. Follow us on both Twitter and Youtube to get the latest news, the best previews and reviews for all things beat 'em ups. If you are a developer, talk to our team so we can help promote your game on all social medias. At the Flying Kick Network, we got your back here.





How Do We Play

By Scottie J.

Scottie from Beal Action Central here again for another Brawlers Alley article.

In this issue, I want to explore the various different ways that players from around the world enjoy their favorite games and give a bit of insight into what goes into performing these types of runs. Let's take a look at 6 variations of play that you may or may not have tried.



CASUAL PLAY

The natural first step of playing any game is to simply sit down and enjoy what's on the table. In casual play, you don't have to worry about things like high scores, lost lives, credits used, or any other aspects of a game, aside from just taking time out of your day to enjoy a title alone or with friends.



From here, players will either find themselves satisfied with what they can perform and the experience they have had, or possibly branch off into other styles of play that can be more demanding. Either way they go, the fact remains the same. The act of playing a game seriously or casually doesn't matter so long as you have a good time doing it.



1CC

This is the most free form and well known style of gameplay in terms of high level displays.

Be it more reserved or defensive play, all out aggression, or anything in between. The 1CC player only has one objective, to clear a game on the set number of lives they are given or earn.

This style allows a player to experiment and show their play style in any way they wish, make mistakes, and overall show their knowledge of a game by beating it in whatever way they wish as long as they stay within the bounds of never using a continue.

NO MISS

No miss play is far more demanding to a player than a 1CC. The objective remains the same as listed in the previous section, but with the added stipulation of now never losing a single life.

Playing in a No Miss category will require a stronger knowledge of a game and its mechanics. You will need to employ stronger and more tested tactics against various enemies and bosses because the window for error is far smaller. Player expression is still very high in this category, but the strategies employed will need to be much more consistent.

SCORE ATTACK

A Score Attack run requires a deep understanding of the game's mechanics in how score is determined. Players will be tasked with not only knowing things such as what moves yield the highest points, what characters can achieve the most points in a single round, it's more beneficial to handle enemies solo or in a group, what hidden aspects of the game can result in extra points consistently (see Alchemy in Final Fight), or how stage time/health remaining change a stage end bonus, but also being able to execute these strategies with as little fault as possible.

THE BEST PLAYERS				
1ST	EYE	168000	STAGE 7	
2ND	DEC	80000	STAGE 7	
3RD	DOL	40000	STAGE 6	
4TH	SAL	20000	STAGE 5	

Play in this category tends to lean into more conserved and defensive play depending on the title due to the nature of asking the player to squeeze every last point out of as many encounters as possible. Patience is key here.

SPEEDRUNNING

Go fast and do it by any means necessary (within the bounds of established rules). Speedrunning is one of the oldest forms of known high skilled play, and as such has continued to maintain a high respect, and arguably the highest number of concurrently engaged players and communities.

Players here will be challenged to understand what is required to get from the title of a game to the end credits in the shortest time possible. They will need to know what and how various characters can yield the fastest results, and employ strategies with them both in stages or in boss encounters that tend to be highly understood and replicable.

There is a common misconception that speedrunners require glitches and bugs to perform their fastest attempts, but please understand that depending on the category of speedrun you are performing, such tactics may outright be banned (See any %, Glitchless, No Major Skips, etc. in numerous titles.)

CHALLENGE RUNS

Challenge runs can be the most varied experience you can have in a Beat 'Em Up due to the nature of what they can entail. When challenge running, you are tasking yourself with the act of beating a game or section of a game with additional rules added to increase the difficulty.



Maybe you want to clear Final Fight without ever once using an infinite combo, or clear a stage in Streets of Rage 2 without taking any damage. How about Fight N Rage or Mayhem Brawler without using special moves, or even Dawn of the Monsters without using any augments?

The sky's the limit in challenge runs, and it is up to you as the player to both set and follow the stipulations set, and try to accomplish said challenge.

IN CONCLUSION

Hopefully after reading this, you have discovered a new way you may want to play a game you enjoy yourself, or possibly want to explore the internet to see what games may have to offer that you may have not known were offered before.



This amazing genre has something to offer to players of all skill levels so long as they have the desire to seek it out, and we hope that something above will inspire you to do so.

Stay strong, stay hype, and have fun!

UNMASKING

PULLING NO PUNCHES



We talked to the guys at Braindead Broccoli about the recently released Pulling no Punches, to find out how the game was funded, what were the inspirations behind the story and what motivated the choice of the cast and theme of the game. Featuring four angry girls, Pulling no Punches is staged in a fictional country where punches to the face were the only solution to stop the spreading of a deadly disease.

BA - Braindead Broccoli started two years ago and Pulling no Punches is your debut game. Why did you guys decide to start with a beat 'em up?

Ulisses - When me and Kainã started the game he was willing to practice animation of different characters and I was willing to practice 2D game development and fighting mechanics. Since we both enjoyed old beat 'em ups, it ended up as a natural path for us.

and yet, the results were very surprising. Cartase's campaign was our thermometer of how much people believe in our project and identify with it in some form.

BA - It took two years developing the game, which were the biggest challenges the team met on the way?

Ulisses e Luiza - As we said before, the game was 100% funded by Catarse and the amount was

sometimes this is challenging. More than that, the game was all done remotely, the theme did not meet in person, and that was also a challenge, especially for the creative process and the project's management.

BA - What games inspired you?

Ulisses - Mostly Scott Pilgrim, where we looked for some contemporary scenarios, comic adaptation and a good chunk of the game's structure, and Streets of Rage 4, for the way they updated the franchise in many graphical and gameplay aspects.

BA - And how the idea behind Pulling no Punches came to be?

Kainã - I've always been interested in beat 'em up games, more for the aesthetic than the game itself, so I've always wanted to create something in this style, but with my own touch, to create something new with a new theme on top of this aesthetic which I think is cool.

Most things I create are kind like this. Then, by the middle of 2020, I decided to watch some youtube tutorials to learn how to animate, just for the sake of learning. I already tried many times and was never able to engage. Animation is hard as f**k! This was right when the people were locked at home, in quarantine. I remember seeing



BA - The game was all funded by Catarse (a brazilian Kickstarter-like website), can you tell us a little about this experience?

Luiza - It was amazing! We did a lot of projection, we studied a lot about crowdfunding strategies

intended only to make the launch of the game possible. We worked for free all this time (and until now, to be honest), and that's why the team, in some form, kept their jobs and projects. In a certain way this was a difficulty, because we needed to divide ourselves and



a news piece with pictures of some pub in Botafogo, Rio de Janeiro, that was crowded with people. Everyone without a face mask. Like if the quarantine and the pandemic did not exist and such. I remember finding it all so surreal that I sent Ulisses a message asking if he wanted to make a game where the character gets out on the streets and beats everyone who did not respect the quarantine. It was from this idea, my desire to learn to animate and enjoy beat 'em ups that Pulling began to take shape.

BA - The game clearly has political connotations related to Brazil, was there any resistance on the team over this idea?

Kainã - The game kind of started with this connotation. There was never a Pulling no Punches without this kind of stuff, it is the heart of the whole thing. It started with just me and Ulisses and the rest of the team was parachuting along the way to work in the game. First was João, he is Ulisses' brother and was responsible for the OST, helping us to make things more alive. At this time, there were only the three of us. I was creating the visuals, João the OST and Ulisses was making the code. With that, we manage to make a small trailer and post it on social media. In this meantime Vitor appeared, he liked the trailer so much that he offered himself to make the sound effects. Then came Luiza, partner of Ulisses and a personal friend for a long time, to take care of the social networks and all promotional related stuff. Sometime after that Filipe came to the team, he is responsible for the lighting of the game amongst other things he does. I have known Filipe for a while, from the comic book scene, so everybody kind of knows each other as

friends or family. This was never a problem to create the game.

Ulisses - In a general way, it was cool. Since we started the project with the concept of the game, everyone that was joining in was already cool with the political themes and satires we made. In other words, the project has political connotations in its core, in an inseparable way.

BA - How did the public react to the idea at Catarse and in Brazil in general?

Luiza - It was great. We received a lot of positive feedback, the public really enjoyed the satires, Kainã's drawings and the success of the campaign at Catarse was a reflection of it all.

BA - The game offers to the player only female characters, something we've only seen in a few games, why did you make this choice?

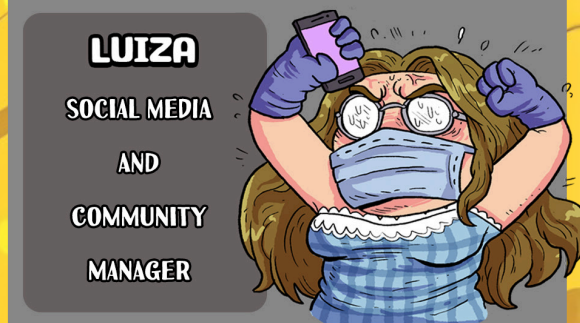
Kainã - It wasn't a thing that I gave too much thought. It was kind of just what happened. The first character I created was a chick and the others also happened to be. I like female characters in games, movies and so on. And in most games you always play with a man. Even if it isn't human, he is always a little guy. I wanted to do something different because it is what I find cool. It is cool to draw and nice to have in game. In my creation process, I always try to value my likes more (and the likes of the team). I don't care that much for, like, what the market potentially wants or what sells more or... I don't know. I do what I think is cool.

BA - Can you talk a little about the characters and the inspiration behind them?

Kainã - Laura, the redhead, was the first character I created and was the first sprite I drew. She's exactly the same as another



ULISSES
PROGRAMMER
AND
GAME DESIGNER



LUIZA
SOCIAL MEDIA
AND
COMMUNITY
MANAGER



KAINÃ
COMIC ARTIST,
ILLUSTRATOR,
SCREENWRITER
AND ANIMATOR



JOÃO MATHEUS
BASS PLAYER
AND
COMPOSER



VITOR MIAU
AUDIO
DESIGNER



FILIFE
PROGRAMMING
INTERN AND
CODER



character I've created before for a comic. Since the game started on a trial and error basis, I didn't give much thought about how the only playable character in the game would be when we created the demo. She was the first thing to cross my mind. In a certain way, she was born ready.

Nina and her little robot were a little more planned. She is slightly inspired by two friends of mine. First I made her without the robot, but then we noticed that she didn't have enough to differentiate her from Laura and something unique was missing. Then came the idea of giving her a friendly little robot. An excellent idea that opened the way to many cool movesets.

Olga was easy to create. When I

was a teenager I didn't see many gothic, metal and rock people represented in games or in the mainstream media. It was before Jack Black's game (*Brütal Legend*). Today there are some, but it was something I missed when I was younger. She kind of came from that, I guess.

The hardest to create was **Lola**. Because we already had three unique characters and we needed a fourth that was also unique. Not only unique, but one that stands out if placed side-by-side with the others. One important thing in character creation is you realize who is who in a glance. But we already had three characters and no idea about what to do with the forth one. She was the one who took longer for us to get to a result we liked. What really worked was making her strong, inspired by Abby, from *The Last of Us 2*. Then we decided to make her more muscular and the rest was easy.

BA - About the game mechanics, what can the player expect?

Ulisses - We worked a lot to make a game fun to play at every second, with the player always finding ways to beat the enemies up. There are combos, grabs, abilities to unlock and items to buy and modify

the character for each level. The coolest thing was creating the bosses, we toy around a lot with what we could do to surprise the player in a fun way. The story of the game has the same length as a movie! So, it is cool to gather some friends and try to play from the beginning to the end together, like in the old times, with multiplayer for up to four players. It's also fun to try and play once with each character since they are all very unique and give the game different flavors.

BA - One of the most sought after things in a beat 'em up these days is a good combo system. How does this work in your game?

Ulisses - It was one of the coolest things (and the hardest) to develop, but we reached the point we wanted. The characters have a lot of mobility, they can run, roll, dodge and land more dynamic moves like flying kicks and slides. You can do several strategies, like releasing a heavy blow and then grabbing the enemy in the air, blocking blows and then using a heavy attack to punish the enemy or even, in multiplayer, sequentially hitting the enemy to trap him in the air, doing a lot of damage. As you advance in the story with character, they will unlock new moves and open up possibilities to new styles of gameplay. Since the first day of development our goal was to create a fun gameplay in the first place.

BA - The game was hand drawn, why choose this style instead of the more traditional pixel art?

Kainã - I don't know how to work with pixel art. I think it is freaking hard to do and even so doing it right. What I kind of know how to do is a more cartoony style, something like Adult Swim. Cute drawings, but not so much. Something more dirty, with imperfections, this is the aesthetics I like, cute and grotesk at the same time. I also like the idea of playing a cartoon, I think this is something



you don't see very often. Another thing that I wanted to do was frame by frame animation. I didn't want to use rigging because personally I think it is terrible. I like a more fluid animation, I like to see the character stretching and squashing and each frame must be different. Making a game with frame by frame animation screwed my life because I had to do a million drawings until my hand fell off!

BA - What were your inspirations in creating the world's design, which is pretty cartoony?

Kainã - My main inspiration is always Brazil, specifically the streets of Rio de Janeiro. I like it because it is not perfect, the sidewalks are all twisted. I like when you look at a place and it seems that people live or walk in there, that things were built bit by bit. I like when you have a darker patch on the street because a hole was covered. Big cities are, most of the time, dirt, filled with garbage and very often ugly. A cacophony of ads and things glued to the walls and pub's facades made in the style "graphic-design-is-my-passion." I was looking at capturing it. Trying to bring all these elements and put them

in the game's environment, but it is hard. I had to look at a lot of stuff on Google Maps to see what caught my attention. I had to look at how other artists interpreted cities in their drawings. There were two guys I like that I think drew cities very well: Robert Crumb and Dave Cooper. Crumb draws the USA in an incredible way. You can see poles and cables all tangled up. In his documentary, he speaks about how uncommon it is to see all these elements together in this exaggerated way, but he purposely puts everything together to give a feeling that the city is swallowing you, because that's how he felt about the USA. Dave Cooper draws all his cities dirty, with garbage on the floor, etc. Very often is a futuristic city, or an alien one, but still

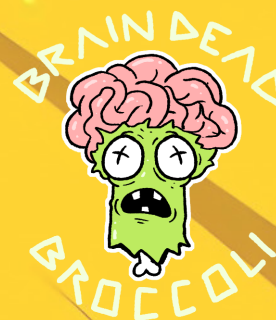
looks believable because it looks a vivid place. I inspired myself in how those guys used their vision to draw these environments to create the scenarios of Pulling no Punches. Is the imperfection that makes it work. Imperfections and overkill.

BA - What can we expect from the sound track? What were the musical influences of the game?

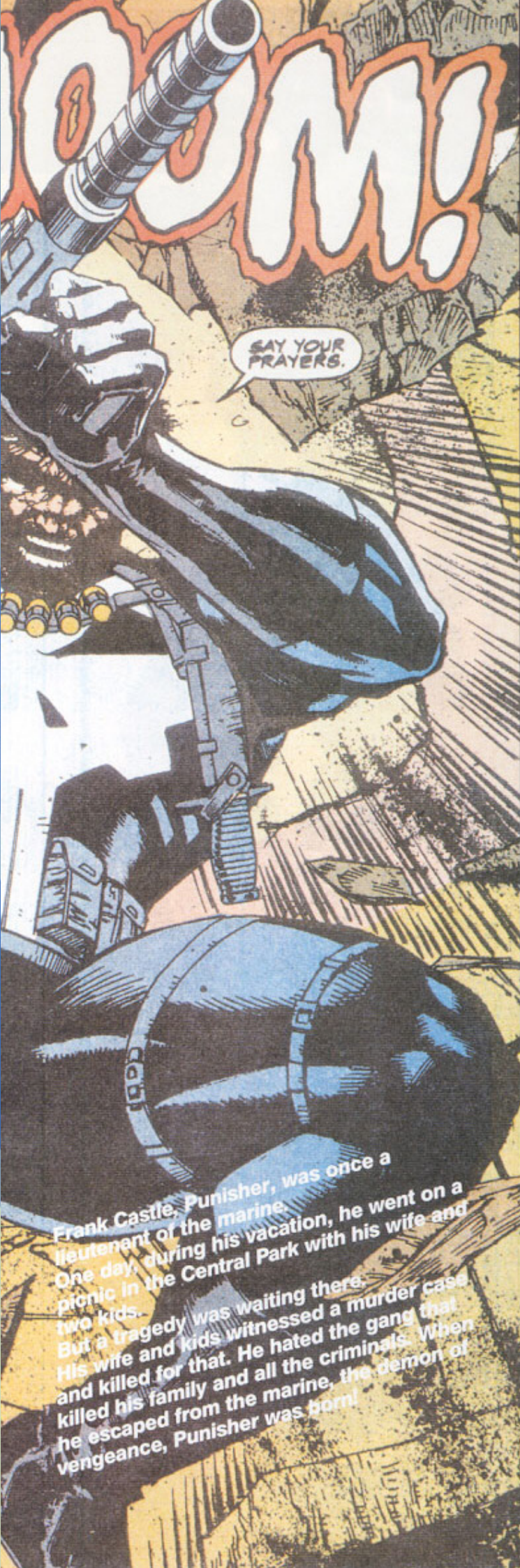
João - You all can expect an arcade style OST, with the occasional "poetic license" in terms of that sound, with synthwave influences of the time, but also funk, heavy metal and even some classical music in some points.

BA - And for the future? What should the fans expect from Braindead Broccoli? Sequel? DLC?

Ulisses - It is hard to say, we are focused only on the release of Pulling no Punches and we still have nothing official to announce for the near future. Enjoy the game!







Frank Castle, Punisher, was once a lieutenant of the marine. One day, during his vacation, he went on a picnic in the Central Park with his wife and two kids. But a tragedy was waiting there. His wife and kids witnessed a murder case and killed for that. He hated the gang that killed his family and all the criminals. When he escaped from the marine, the demon of vengeance, Punisher was born!



PULLING NO PUNCHES



It's probably to no one's surprise that Brazil is a country where beat 'em up games were and still are one of the favorite genres. If you look at the OpenBOR community you will find an incredible amount of excellent games created by the Brazilian community. Curiously, it is not that often we see commercial games developed and published by a Brazilian team. Pulling no Punches, from Braindead Broccoli, is here to add one more to the list, using a lot of "in your face" humor and using the pandemic as a background to the story.

STORY LINE

During a fictional global pandemic, in a fictional country, curiously similar to Brazil, four girls are tired of people not complying with the safety measures, including the president of that same country, and decided to take the matter in their hands, punching each and everyone that is not cooperating with the health authorities. A story that can be very personal for some Brazilians and folks around the world due to some similarities with some events that are still ongoing in the real world. The story is short and presented in small cut-scenes that will pop up between the levels. There's nothing much to the story here actually and, as usual with beat 'em ups, you can skip it at will without losing anything important. The story is also told in the stages, with the backgrounds, where bars, churches, signs and posters tell a lot of what is happening in that country but since it is all in portuguese, it, unfortunately, will not work on those who do not speak the language. There's also a lot of humor in the game that will not make sense to the foreign player base unless they know details of Brazilian politics and current situation which, while will not ruin the story, it may leave the player wondering if something was supposed to be funny or not.

GRAPHICS

Following a recent trend in beat 'em ups, the developers of the game have chosen a hand-drawn approach to the graphics and it works very well here. The characters and the backgrounds look great, with lots of details on the girls and the places you visit. Trash on the streets, graffiti everywhere, it gives you a sense of a living place, inhabited by people who do not care too much with the looks of their town. The four girls also look great, they have that gritty look from cartoons like Ren and Stimpy, with accentuated details and strong facial expressions. It is a very interesting art-style because it gives the characters, and the world for that matter, a lot of texture that you don't see very often. They look and move just like a cartoon and you can't shake this feeling while you play thanks to the fluidity of the animation, which is excellent here. Your characters, your enemies, the bosses, all moves and acts with a lot of personality and you can see the devs put a lot of effort and passion on each one of the frames.





The world is also very vivid and beautiful. The amount of detail you get from each level is outstanding with some very good representation of what a city in Brazil would look like. Actually, we can confirm that they captured the streets of Brazil pretty well. The dirtiness of the streets, the walls covered with graffiti, is all a staple of this country and I really enjoyed seeing it represented in a game. Some of the levels are more detailed than others, like the third level, which lacks a bit of detail on the

background, showing green hills on the horizon that are just a green patch, without anything to give it some life. This doesn't affect the game in any way, but after seeing so much care and detail in some levels, this one really stood out by the lack of it. Pulling no Punches also has incredible lighting. Some of the levels will make your jaw drop so good is the way they treated the light. It is very similar to what they did in SoR4 and it makes the game look even better and richer, accentuating the details even more and giving to some levels a very good atmosphere. In general, Braindead Broccoli made an outstanding job with the graphics and, while I understand the style isn't for everybody, no one can deny the love, care and dedication they put into this game.



AUDIO

To accompany such good art-style, the devs came up with a very interesting OST. The tracks have a lot of Brazilian influences, especially from Brazilian Funk, some rock and even classical influences. The devs have chosen a chiptune style for the game, with electronic notes taking hold of the composition and sounding like the games of the good old times!

All levels have more than one track, since they are divided in areas, so each area will have their own tune, which is pretty good to hear in a game like this, although the transition from one to another can be a little rough sometimes. Some of the tracks are very, very good, especially in the second stage where some classical tunes are very well made and give you a hominous sensation. One thing I need to note here is, while the OST is pretty good, it may not be exactly suited to a beat 'em up. They work in conjunction with the levels you are in, giving you a feeling of the place you are passing through, but they are not tracks that will pump you up to beat some baddies like "Go Straight" or "The City Slums".

The sound effects are also on point, with punches, throws and kicks having that oomph that will satisfy most of the players with each strike. When you defeat an enemy you will listen to a very satisfying "splosh" sound and when you clear a scene a ding sound will let you know you can go ahead. It may seem simple when you read about it, but it works so well that it will become a second nature for you after the first few moments playing it. The game has no voices whatsoever, except for one or other laugh from a boss, but this is not a problem here, as I said, the sound effects work so well that you won't miss a scream or two from your enemies.



GAMEPLAY & COMBAT



Pulling no Punches offers you four characters that are pretty interesting to play with and although they have basically the same set of moves, their range, speed and strength are varied enough to make each one unique to play. Interesting enough, here you don't have your all-around character with all stats set on medium. All characters have their stats all over the place, making them a unique cast and a very nice surprise.

You have Laura, that is the second strongest character in the game, with very good agility but a small reach, Nina, that is not so strong or agile, but have a great reach, Olga, who is extremely agile, but lacks in reach and strength, and finally Lola, the grappler, who is extremely strong, with a great reach a poor agility.



The gameplay is a mix of beat 'em up with very light RPG mechanics. You start the game in a world map, just like Scott Pilgrim, and can interact with some NPCs and buy some items that can boost your stats with the money you earn defeating enemies. Each character starts with a basic set of moves that you will expand throughout your gameplay finding pieces of books scattered throughout the levels. You start with your typical weak punch, strong punch, jump, block, a dash and a grab move that works as a shoulder throw. Your character also has a special bar that fills



when you hit or get hit by your enemies. The basic stuff that, thankfully, are the basics for a game like this today, instead of just draining your life as it used to be. This set of moves will be expanded to a more complex set with dodges, slides, throws and aerial attacks. It all works very well, with good and responsive controls and easy to pull moves.



Unfortunately, you won't be using most of these moves, most of the time. While everything so far is pretty solid and an amazing achievement for a small team in their first try, the combat is extremely flawed and plagued with mistakes that are common to a lot of games in the same situation. You can easily defeat any regular enemy spamming with only a single move. It could be your slide, your strong attack, your flying kicks, aside from your weak attack, all attacks will drop your enemy on the first hit and they don't have any i-frame window or comeback move to protect

themselves. Some enemies can avoid some of your attacks but it won't be long until you find one that can put them to sleep with 2 or 3 hits. The same, or even worse, can be said about the bosses. They are huge, very well done, but they are extremely boring to fight. First of all, they almost never can be knocked down. They have an "exhausted animation" after taking a lot of hits, but most of the time your combos will be useless against them. Yes, you will take some energy from them, but soon they will counter and your options will be dodge and repeat or block and repeat. The bosses also don't have any variety in their attacks, they will often use one or two moves that will certainly knock you down if they hit you and that's it. There is, unfortunately, no real combat here, just an exhaustive repetition of moves until you beat the boss. This is all a shame, because the game has a very good basis.



EARTH IS LIKE A PIZZA!
Delicious, covered with cheese and FLAT!



The control is solid, the characters are extremely interesting and different from each other, and the enemies, even though are just a few, have some interesting mechanics and attacks that could have opened opportunities for a lot of good fights if the combat was a little more fleshed out. Extended combos, aerial combat, on the ground attacks, juggles, cancels, all of this are missing in this game which renders the combat dull after sometime. Which brings us to another problem with the game. It is extremely short. Here you will have only four levels and the game is over. Not that you need 200 levels to make a good game, not at all, the best beat 'em ups are usually the ones you can beat in under an hour, but here you end up feeling that something is missing. This ends up making the world map pointless and just a waste of time because there's no alternate

path and, as far as I know, no secrets to uncover, just some shops to buy consumables that could have been displayed between each level instead. Your characters also suffer from the same lack of i-frames as your enemies so, be prepared to have your throws interrupted and, in crowded scenes, be trapped by the enemies without a chance to recover.

The AI also could use some tweaks, it's there, it works, but sometimes you'll see enemies stopping for no reason and standing there, just waiting for you to beat them. Others will hit you and walk away, apparently knowing that you don't have any i-frames and he will give you a chance to recover. There is, in the end, no urgency in the combat, no spectacle, just mindless and boring repetition of one move to rule them all. ✨



CONCLUSION

While everything seems right at a first glance, with great graphics, animation, good soundtrack and responsive controls, after a while you start to notice something wrong with the game. The lack of variety in the combat, the one-move strategy that you can use throughout the whole game and uninspired boss battles soon becomes evident and make the game a hard one to recommend to new and old fans of the genre. The game is not lost, there are a lot of good things to work with here if the developers really want to make this game great. We have seen this before with other games and how an update can transform a beat 'em up from a boring experience to an amazing game that figures among the best these days in less than a year. Gathering an experienced test group, getting advice from some pro-players would do wonders to this game since the basis for something good is already here. Otherwise, this game will be remembered for nothing but its humor and will soon be forgotten by those who really appreciate a good combat above anything else.

The game is available now on Steam with console versions coming later this year.



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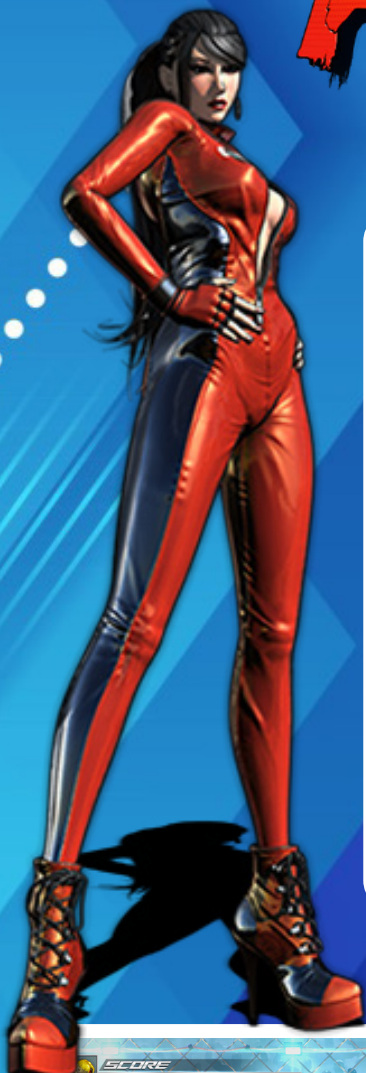
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THE TAKEOVER



What do you do if your daughter is kidnapped? Call the police? Wrong! You call your husband and your best friend and hit the streets beating every bad guy in your path until you get your kid back! Inspired by the likes of Streets of Rage and Final Fight, The TakeOver is not only a homage to those games but it also offers an innovative free-form combat system where you don't have a particular sequence of buttons to press to create a combo. You can combine your punches and kicks the way you see fit and land an incredible amount of damage on your enemies being even able to kill a foe with a single combo sequence.

With pre-rendered assets, music from Yuzo Koshiro and others, The TakeOver is a solid entry in the genre and will grant you a lot of good time. If you enjoyed Streets of Rage 4, this is your next game.



Inspired by the cast of a Brazilian podcast with the same name, 99Vidas will take you through a tour in Brazil in the 90s. With lots of characters to choose and to unlock, you will be exploring (check number) typical Brazilian locations, beating everyone in your way. All your characters have specific moves and powers that can be upgraded using points and will be crucial to make your journey a little bit easy. The pixel art here is beautiful and the animation, both from your characters and your enemies, will not disappoint you.

But don't be fooled by the warm and vibrant look of this game, 99Vidas can be pretty tough and you will need to understand your characters and find the best strategy for each enemy.



99 VIDAS





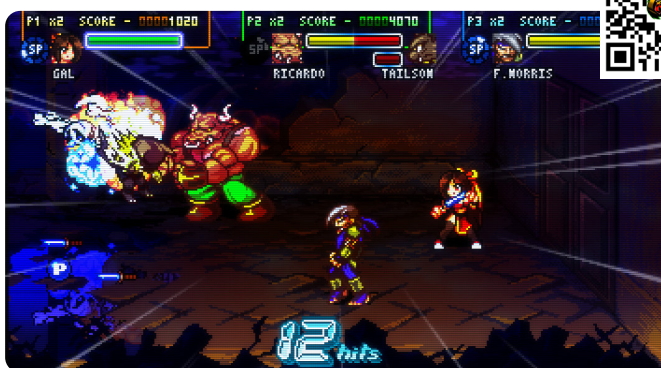
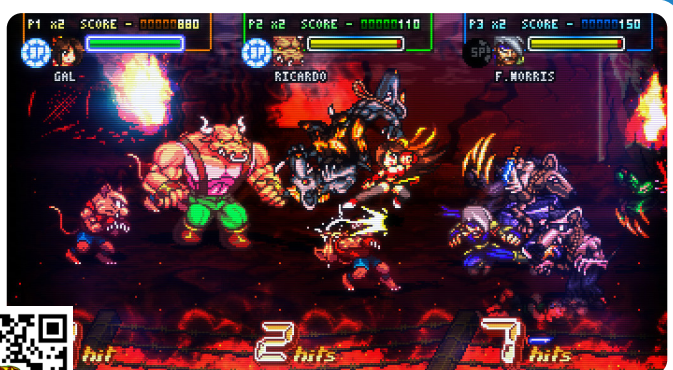
The friends of RINGO ISHIKAWA

Inspired by the classic River City Ransom, The Friends of Ringo Ishikawa, is a beat 'em up with light RPGs mechanics, an open world and a linear story that will put you on the shoes of Ringo Ishikawa, a teenager living his last years as a student in Japan, fighting not only his foes but also his future and his decisions in life. With colorful graphics but a dark tone, Ringo Ishikawa is a beat 'em up that will make you think about your life while you help our hero to fix his. The combat is fluid, with good animation and very grounded in reality. There's no special or super powers, only real life techniques that you must master to face anyone in the streets. You have no defined enemies too, it will depend on your actions towards the many gangs in the game. With a good story, realistic combat and a theme that talks about growing up in a hopeless world, The Friends of Ringo Ishikawa isn't your typical beat 'em up, but is a heck of a good one.



FIGHT RAGE 2

Costumes, new modes, new speeds for the game and even new characters to play in the extra modes are some of those unlockables that you can purchase using the currency you earn in game. The game is brutal and won't hold your hands. This is a classic affair where you start with a complete set of moves and will have to master them to survive increasingly difficult levels. The story is simple and won't get in your way since all cut-scenes are skippable, but it is about a world where humans were enslaved by mutants and you have to free them. Nothing complex like the last game, but enough to get you entertained. This is a game that you can't miss if you enjoy a great combat with one of the best controls you will see in a game like this.





If you like educational games this one is perfect for you. Not only it will teach you history, telling the story of the Roman invasion of Britain but you also will learn human anatomy, while you eviscerate your enemies one by one. With a solid and varied combat, Wulverblade will take you across Britain fighting hordes of Romans and British traitors throughout eight levels trying to protect your people. For this you will be using any resource in your way, from the weapons of your fallen foes to their severed limbs. You can use most weapons you find as a secondary weapon so you can save the more powerful ones to the bosses or more crowded moments. You can also summon wolves once per level and can enter in rage mode once the rage bar is filled. If you're looking for a good challenge, Wulverblade is a good choice.



THE ULTIMATE BEAT'EM
COMMUNITY

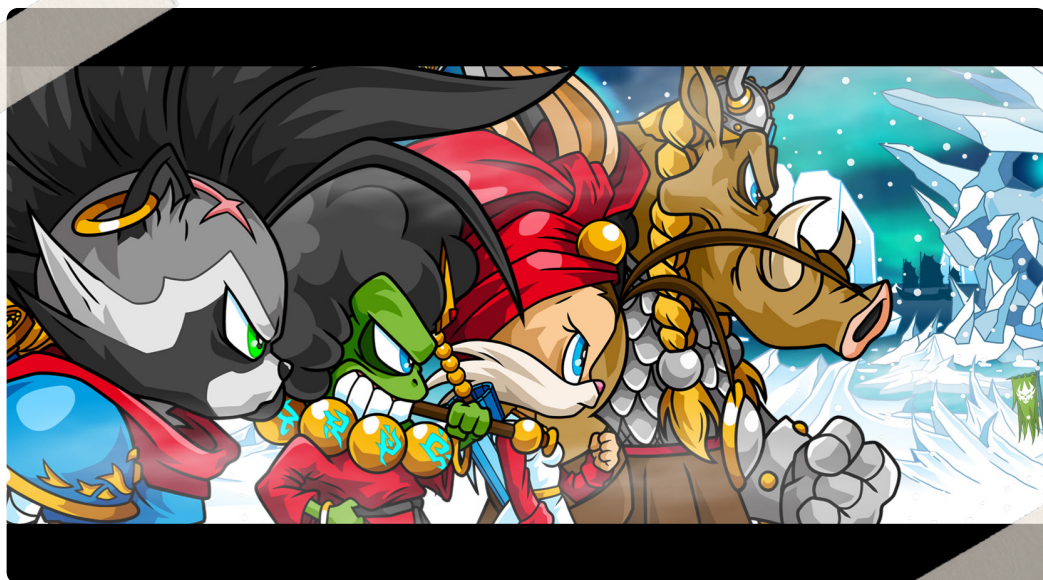
BRAWLERS



AVENUE

HIT THE STREETS





FIRST
LOOK

Released in March of this year, *Jitsu Squad* is ready to receive a huge update from the developer Tanuki Creative Studio and we got a lot of details about what's coming up for you right here.



- Briefing -

>> Gameplay & Graphics <<

First, if you are not aware of this game, here's the deal: Jitsu Squad is an extremely fast paced beat 'em up, with extremely good cartoony graphics and an impressive original soundtrack. You have four characters to choose from, with a great variety of moves and techniques, playing very differently from each other. Not to mention the very creative and extremely good looking places you will be visiting. The details on the scenarios, characters and enemies in this game will make your eyes pop. The amount of colors, the flashing lights, all of this will grant you a visual spectacle that is rarely seen in games like this.

>> Music & Sound Effects <<

The soundtrack offers a great rock'n roll inspired tune that surely will please the fans of the genre. The tracks are made to pump adrenaline in your blood, giving you an urgency and a will to fight that holds so well to the gameplay that is hard to think of other beat 'em up with such a good OST. I will mention the track Surfing on the Lava here, because if you ask ten people which is the best track of the game, eleven will tell you this is the one. The music is absolutely marvelous!

>> Combat <<

Sure, you guys know here we appreciate good combat above all else and Jitsu Squad does not disappoint on this matter. As I said before, the combat is extremely fast paced and varied, with lots of moves to learn during the game to give you the variety this type of game deserves. Not only are the moves varied, but the enemies you will face, the most absurd enemies that you will find in a beat 'em up, and will put your knowledge about your move set to the test. Fast and weak enemies, aerial enemies, tank enemies, the game got it all and will not shy away from throwing it all at you at once. As the game clearly states at the beginning of each fight: It's Crush or Die!

>>

- Announcements -

Tanuki Creative was kind enough to send us some exclusive material for their next huge update. The game so far has received a lot of small updates with improvements to the overall balance of the game to small additions like the new features for the weapons you find laying on the stages, which improves your stats. Now, the developers have decided to make a huge update with lots of new content. The update is set to be released at the end of the year and we also can announce that this will be the same date that the console version will finally arrive.

Check out the screenshots and descriptions of each mode that you will be able to play in a short few months:

>> New Game + <<

Play the game again with all your moves and stats kept from your last run but don't get too comfy, enemy waves will be different from what you are used to and will get you by surprise.

>> Kabuki Theater Challenge <<

Think you are good at this game? So take the challenge at the Kabuki Theater and face endless waves of enemies and see how long you can last.

>>



>> Extra Hard Difficulty <<

So, you finished the game at the Master difficulty and now you think there's nothing else for you? Well, be prepared to pull your hair off in the new Insane Difficulty.

>> Time Attack <<

Are you a speedrunner? If so, you are in luck because now you will be able to time your gameplay in-game and show how fast you can be to your friends.

>> Ex-Moves <<

Want to give more damage and add more flair to your game? Hunt down extra scrolls to unlock your Ex-Moves, powerful versions of regular moves that can be unleashed by doing inputs with your super instead of your regular moves.



>> Achievements <<

Kill a thousand enemies? Make a five hundred combo sequence? Kill a hundred enemies without taking a hit? Well, we don't know what they will be yet, but you can be sure that achievements are coming so you can flex your abilities in game and still prove it to your friends.

>>

The update is coming later this year, still with no date set in stone, but the developers are working hard to deliver this awesome update in a few months. The game will also get a release for PS Family, Xbox Family and Nintendo Switch in the same period so, if you don't have a PC you will also be able to enjoy this awesome game.

If all of this wasn't enough for you, the game will also get its first new playable character and, if you are already familiar with the game, the familiar face will be a very nice surprise for you!



>> Dash Kobayashi <<

The leader of the Kitsune Clan, Dash is a true ninja master armed with the powerful Tamashi Katana. Dash is Hero's rival and responsible for killing Hero's father and the entire Yamagiwa Clan! He has lightning fast movements and uses his blade which contains the souls of all his victims to cause mayhem to the opponent. Dash will get a unique play style that will bring a fresh experience to the game. ★





BELT ACTION CENTRAL



BROK

Under the Magnifying Glass



What do you get when you mix a Point'n Click Adventure game with beat 'em up mechanics? That's what you're about to find out in our chat with Fabrice Breton, creator of Brok: The Investigator, the first game of its kind. Join us in this interview while we talk about its development, inspirations, difficulties and the themes surrounding this awesome game.

BA - Tell us a little about yourself. (your background, other games, formation, if already worked in the industry etc)

FB - Hi! I'm Fabrice Breton, a 38 year old French solo developer & publisher. I have released the silly adventure game Demetrios (which I made practically entirely by myself) on PC, PS4, PS5, Vita, Xbox, Switch, Android and iOS (phew!) as well as ported 3 games from another developer to those same consoles (Xenon Valkyrie+, Riddled Corpses EX and Demon's Tier+)

BA - Brok has been in development for more than half a decade, how was those last 5 years for you personally?

FB - 6 years actually, and that's not even counting the ideas I started gathering as soon as I left my day job in 2014. It was a lot of hard work, but on the other hand making a game by yourself isn't the same as working for a company. I also don't have the pressure of a publisher to meet deadlines. The sales of the previous games allowed me to not worry about financial aspects. I also insisted on not cutting any game features. This would have sped up the development but would also have dulled what makes the game unique, the mix of genres in particular. So yes, the Brok that will be released is 95% my original vision! ^^

BA - When did the idea to make Brok come to be? How did it all start?

FB - Even before starting work on Demetrios in 2014 (which actually is a remake of a game I developed when I was a teenager) I knew that the indie market was crowded and I needed my next project to stand out. My first idea was to blend two « niche » genres I love but which are diametrically opposed : point & click adventure game (à la Broken Sword) and beat 'em up (à la Streets of Rage). Then I built the gameplay, the characters and the story around it. Everything in the game is linked to this contrast between brain and muscles and the main character is the best example of it.

BA - What are your influences for the beat 'em up aspect of the game?

FB - Definitely Streets of Rage 2, this is the one I've played the most (along with the first one!) and the one I originally based my gameplay on. (I've played more beat 'em ups of course, many 90's arcade games and more modern ones like Castle Crashers). That said, after SOR 4 came out it was too tempting to improve the gameplay further. Stuff like being able to keep hitting enemies after they're « thrown », which wasn't possible in the first demo of Brok.

BA - And what about PnC games?

FB - I've played a lot of them over the years. I was a big fan of Sierra back in the day, hence the multiple « gameover » pictures and situations possible, but also Broken Sword, Discworld, some Lucasarts ones like





Sam & Max). I also borrow ideas from modern adventures (hints system, viewing the hotspots, single « click » interface, the bigger focus on narration...) like the Daedelic games (Deponia) or the Wadjet Eye games (Blackwell). I always attempt to design puzzles to be solved in logical ways (unlike many of the older adventure games which often used obtuse logic to get players to call paid hotlines.) And let's not forget the alternatives. In front of a locked door, you could either find the key or...break the door with your fists ! It's not just games though. I've written the plot so that all characters are linked in some ways, like storytelling that you'd find in modern TV series.

BA - How was the process to decide the art style of the game?

FB - Pretty simple, Brok is inspired by cartoons from the late 80's and early 90's, Disney Afternoon and TaleSpin in particular. These series were actually often darker than expected. I love contrasts: between colorful and cute animals to the dark story with a struggle to survive and anyone can get killed!

BA - What tools did you use to create the world of Brok? (engine, painting software, techniques, and so on)

FB - IGameMaker Studio is my middleware. It can export to PC, consoles and mobile with the same base code, like other engines (Unity, Unreal Engine...) For the art and animations I simply use Photoshop (I did all the backgrounds myself with it). The

artists I commission are free to use their own tools. As for music and sounds, Audacity does the job pretty well.

BA - The game is fairly big, with lots of scenes filled with details. How long did it take to create all those scenes?

FB - I first designed the game entirely with placeholder art – basically, I would draw a very quick draft of the scene. (Some testers got access to the full game 3 years ago while most assets were still placeholders !) It takes around one week to draw/paint each background. There are more than 40 in the final game, without counting all the subscreens, and many rooms span several screens horizontally or vertically. As for coding, dialogue (23,000 spoken lines...) it's too long to count! I don't do big design documents, only for the plot. When it comes to gameplay, I prefer to implement features « on the go » by playing the game and thinking « what if?... » Like, what if we could jump on the table and the NPCs react to it? When it's fun, it's kept !

BA - What were your inspirations when creating this world?

FB - Final Fantasy 7, Fallout, Shenmue, Little Big Adventure... and various sci fi movies and series. I particularly loved the « 3 % » series on Netflix and you might find some similarities to Brok's events. ;)

BA - You did most of the game all by yourself, why did you choose this path? The amount of work must be incredible.

FB - A few reasons :

- I didn't want to take any risks. I was 30 and had saved up enough money from my previous job to buy an apartment but that was about it, I didn't

have a lot of money to pour into a game project.

- I had experience. I started making at the age of 8 and for years, albeit unprofessionally.

- It was finally possible to self publish which wasn't the case 15 or 20 years ago.

- And finally : I prefer indies. Each time I play a AAA games I find them bland. Same gameplay style, always first person or « behind the shoulder » camera (while I personally prefer games with a distant camera offering more focus and creativity over backgrounds), same kind of storytelling highly predictable, all the gameplay is designed around action and barely anything else... They give freedom of movement, without giving freedom of interaction. I'm a big fan of « small scale but tons of options available ». Indies have the unique ideas and quirks that make them interesting.

BA - How did you manage your time between creating the game and your personal life?

FB - It's kinda hard honestly. Some devs say they have a hard time focusing on work, for me it's the opposite. As soon as I'm not working on my game I feel guilty ! Still I try to dedicate time to see family and friends. And I can't wait for the release so I finally have some real time to play this big backlog of games (oh the irony of being a gamedev!)



BA - Is this something you would say to a new indie dev to try?

FB - Well it's not really a choice for most of us, unless you're already wealthy :p I think all successful indie devs had to start « in their garage » with a lot of hard work, and then you have some leeway when one project becomes successful.

BA - The story of the game touches on some pretty serious subjects like climate change and class struggles, automatization, why did you choose to talk about those topics?

FB - Brok takes place in a timeline where animals replaced humans who went extinct. It's suggested that these animals had to adapt to climate change and ambient pollution, in particular by building a dome. Except space is limited and selection is performed. Poor citizens live in the slums outside of the dome and have to survive, depending on pills provided by the Government. I don't think it's a conscious choice to talk about this, but yes they're a reflection on where our society is going. How will we adapt to changes?

BA - The world of Brok can feel very hopeless sometimes, is this a reflection of how you see our world?

FB - Actually this varies according to the ending you get (there are 11 in the game), thus according to your choices. Overall this is a tale offering hope, showing that even in the worst situations we can always make the best of it.

BA - Do you see games as a means to educate people or at least warn them about problems we face in real life?

FB - Maybe ? It's not really my first goal, I want to entertain first and foremost. But if this can help, why not !

BA - We, unfortunately, live in a world divided by harsh opinions. Do you think your game can anger some players because of the subjects talked about in the game?

FB - So far this hasn't happened. One or two people thought some of the inventions didn't make sense in the real world ; which is pretty silly considering this is meant to be a futuristic, alternate universe. Some think there's too much talking. But the vast majority loved the free Prologue (97 % positive on Steam). Getting negative reviews always hurts, of course. You always wonder what you did wrong, whether this is a real design problem or just because people have different sensibilities. But I'm progressively building a shield, so unless there's a massive amount of negative reviews I'll just use the famous « you can't please everyone ».

BA - Brok is a very cool character. He can be a tough guy but he also has a good heart. What were your inspirations to his design and personality?

FB - I think he's the person everyone would want to hang with – funny, strong and friendly, while on the opposite, his surrogate son Graff is closer to my personality – geeky and stressed about everything in life :p



BA - Why did you choose a crocodile, or anthropomorphic animals for that matter, instead of humans?

FB - The contrast. I wanted a type of animal that would be ambiguous. When you see an alligator, it's hard to tell if it's going to be friendly towards you or to eat you ! 20 - I would like to say something for new devs that are willing to embark on a voyage like you did? Stick to one project, stick to one game engine. I see too many devs constantly starting new projects, thinking « this one is better ». This only leads to finishing nothing. Yes, it's really hard to finish any game. It takes a lot of dedication. You constantly have to make choices. But don't stray from your goal.

BA - And for your players? What would you like to say?

FB - If you're not afraid of trying new things, love beat 'em ups (granted for most of you reading this :p) and enjoy narration, try Brok ! There's a free Prologue available. It's one huge adventure spanning 15 to 20 hours, with lots of choices and replayability, three difficulties... It is fully playable with a gamepad, including the adventure parts (direct control over the main player like a RPG) Most people who love Brok say they don't usually like Point & Clicks yet they love it !



**A very special
thanks**



**TO our
supporters!**

★ GOHBILLY ★ JASON BRADT ★
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BROK

THE INVESTIGATOR



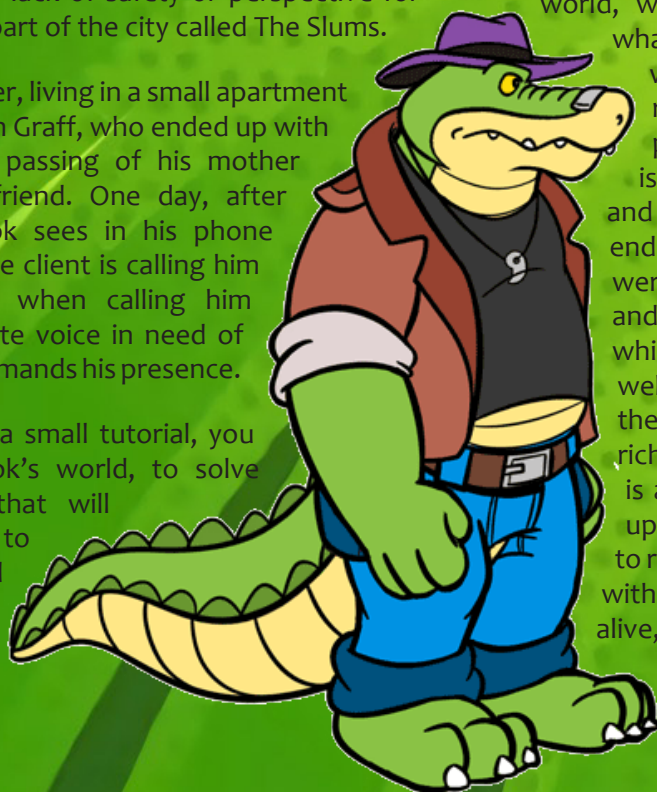
Point'n click games are one of the oldest styles of games that you can find. The same can be said about beat 'em ups. Both born in the 80s, with brawlers appearing in 1986 with *Renegade* and Point'n Clicks being seen for the first time in 1984, with *Enchanted Scepters*. Being almost at the same age, it is a little strange to think that never before has someone thought about combining the two genres in almost 40 years. This was until now, when the France based studio Cowcat Games decided to bring those two old genres together to tell the story of Brok, a crocodile investigator that lives in a world where animals replaced humans and fights and mysteries are everywhere.

STORY LINE

Brok's story is, obviously, not your typical beat 'em up story. This is first and foremost a point'n click game so, story plays a very big part in it. You are Brok, a former boxer fighter who changed careers after some events took place in his life and he decided to become an investigator. He lives in a controlled country, with classes separated in the cities, where the rich live under a protective dome, called The Drums, and the poor live under the open sky, dealing with pollution, garbage and toxic waste and lack of safety or perspective for the future, in a part of the city called The Slums.

Brok is a Slummer, living in a small apartment with his step-son Graff, who ended up with Brok after the passing of his mother Lia, Brok's girlfriend. One day, after waking up, Brok sees in his phone that one possible client is calling him insistently and, when calling him back, a desperate voice in need of help urgently demands his presence.

After that, and a small tutorial, you are out on Brok's world, to solve a small case that will eventually lead to a complicated plot that will change his world forever.



The story, without giving any spoilers, is something else in this game. You'll be invited to think about a lot of stuff that is currently going on in our own world like climate change, automation, AI, class struggle and so on. All those topics are handled with mastery by the developer, not falling under the traditional cliches that topics like those usually bring.

The developer did an amazing job keeping things interesting and fresh, jumping from one topic to another without ever losing the connection between the causes and effects of what is happening in the world now. It is a very well built world, where you can easily understand what is what and why things are the way they are without having to read an entire wiki for that. For a point'n click game, the story here is one of the best I ever followed and although I didn't yet get all the 11 endings the game offers, the 3 I got were pretty different from each other and one was particularly depressing, which I found very refreshing and, well, depressing! For a beat 'em up the story is fantastic, complex and rich. Sure, you must keep in mind this is a point'n click first, with beat 'em up mechanics, so you will have a lot to read before jumping into fights. But with a story so good and characters so alive, you won't mind the moments of story between your fights.



SOUNDS & MUSIC

Talking about the audio, I have little to almost nothing to complain about here. Cowcat made only excellent choices when it came to music and the voice actors. The music here has mostly a new age feel, with sobers and calm tunes that will make you relax while making decisions in the game. All sectors that you visit have their own track and they are all excellent. The fight moments have heavier tunes, with electronic music, more typical of beat 'em ups, taking the front seat with higher pitch notes and heavy drums accompanying your brawls. The music here is really something special, that may not stick with you after you play the game, but will surely be a pleasant surprise for those looking for something a little different than the regular conventions of this type of game.

The same can be said about the voices. Every character here is voice acted and the actors are very, very good. Brok's voice, Bryan Olson, does a fantastic job interpreting the character, giving the 200 kilos giant a lot of convincing emotions and feelings. Not only him but all the actors here were pretty well chosen by Cowcat fitting perfectly to the appearance and personality of the characters. There's nothing to complain here, really. It is hard to review a game when everything is so well put together because there's not much to talk about except, it is excellent.

Unfortunately the sound effects aren't that great. They aren't bad, not at all, but they are a little dry and without that oomph that you hear in some games. They are varied enough, you can hear the metal of the tribots when you punch them or the sound of wood being shattered when you punch a box, but I leave the game with this feeling that they didn't sound satisfying enough. Yes, I am probably nitpicking the game here, because this detail will never bring the game down, but if there is one thing that I think is not great in the game, is the sound of your punches. They are just ok.



GRAPHICS

When it comes to the graphics Brok won't disappoint you in any aspect. Everything is very, very good here. Brok is a hand-drawn game and you can see the developer put a lot of hours and effort into bringing to life each and every scene. The amount of detail you will find here is astonishing. From Brok himself, with his small band-aid on his nose, to the city landscape, with flying cars zooming past the screen and heat effects distorting the horizon.



The feeling of an old cartoon or comic book is everywhere in this game and the art-style is extremely charming. Sure, you won't have here too much flair and special effects to fill your screen with light and explosions, and even the backgrounds, except from one or two scenes, are mostly static, but being a hand-drawn game, made basically by one person, I completely understand the lack of moving parts and a populated city. But what it lacks in movement and life in the backgrounds is compensated by the incredible amount of static details you will find in any scene. Which is expected since you will have to scout every scene for clues. Every place you go in this game is a feast to the eyes. Being a point'n click game this is expected, since you will spend a lot of time looking at each screen, but Cowcat didn't spare efforts to make each scene, even the ones that look empty, filled with details that not only are important to give life to the scene, but also tells a lot of things about the world Brok is living.



Animation is also pretty good, if you know what to expect here. Brok isn't a game with fluid animations and hundreds of frames to each move he can perform. Actually, it is pretty much the opposite. The animation here is stiff, with few frames for each move and it works so well within the game's theme and art-style, that I wouldn't want it any other way. It has that old cartoon feel, with some janky movements and almost no transition from one pose to another. In most games it would be a problem, but here, thanks to the excellent and carefully thought style of the game, the animation seems perfect. In the end, Brok is a very good looking game where all parts are in perfect harmony with each other.

GAMEPLAY & COMBAT

We all know, for beat 'em up games, that all of the above isn't important if the gameplay and combat aren't on point. For a point'n click, is almost the same, except for the story, of course. But how does Brok mix those two aspects of the game? Well, first of all, you have your point'n click mechanics. You can use a controller, a mouse or mouse and keyboard to move Brok and interact with the world. The game is actually very well suited to gamepads and moving the cursor with it is a breeze. You can highlight points of interest with X and select them with the d-pad or move the cursor around the screen with the right analog stick. This makes scouting the screen very easy and controller players won't find any trouble looking for clues. All your findings, clues and notes are easily displayed on the pause menu, being easily accessed at any time in the game. This makes handling items inside the many puzzles of the game very approachable and you will be in no time moving, comparing and combining items with your controller.



If you played any point'n click before, there's nothing new here for you, except for the excellent use of the controller. The gameplay is your typical point'n click affair, you walk through a scene and scout it for clues so you can advance the story a little bit. As usual, you'll face a lot of puzzles here varying from the plain obvious to some that will make you question your intelligence or the developer's sanity! Some of the puzzles can be a little complex if you are not used to this type of game, but thankfully, you can always count with some collectable ads you'll find scattered through the game to grant you tips to solve the more hairiest puzzles you'll find.

For the purists, the game offers the option to turn this possibility off, but you still have to find the ads if you want a 100% completion of the game. What's interesting here is that you can solve some of the puzzles brute forcing your way out of the problem but, as you can predict, this will bring a lot of headaches for you down the road. Nevertheless, the option of beating the heck out of a puzzle is extremely satisfying when you're having too much trouble to solve it.

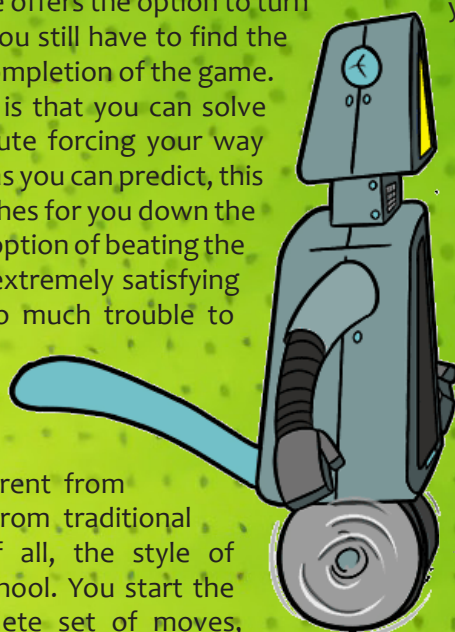
When it comes to combat, what we have here is a little bit different from what we are used to from traditional beat 'em ups. First of all, the style of combat is totally old school. You start the game with your complete set of moves, there's nothing to learn here and the only upgrades you'll do when you level up are your health, strength and special move. You have your punch, your jump, block, dodge, a run button, a desperation move and a special. Combining them will open up opportunities to a lot of different attacks and, although you don't have too much to work with here, what you're able to do can be pretty effective in the game.

You have your basic combo attack with the punches that can become a chain up to five strikes. You have your flying kick, which is perfect for

aerial enemies and to start an attack and you have a very strong uppercut that can be performed by pressing attack and jump at the same time. If you press attack after the uppercut, you can perform a strike that launches your enemies right to the ground, giving them a lot of reasons to want to stay there for some time. Pressing run and then punch works as your strong attack and if you press block after being knocked down will make Brok stop the fall and counter the attacker with a light kick. You can block and this also acts as your dodge move pressing any direction you want. Your desperation move is the typical for beat 'em ups, where you will lose a bit of energy performing it, but in exchange you release a powerful blow to your surroundings and your special, which has its own bar that will be filled as you hit your enemies and will work as a clear-screen attack, except when you have very strong enemies, of course.

This is all you will have from start to finish and this is enough to make a very fun and engaging combat in this game. But, as I said before, things here are a little different from your more traditional beat 'em up. The combat is very slow paced and methodical. Enemies can give you a lot of damage even with the simplest of the attacks and they can also take a lot of punishment before being killed. You have to think before each move because Brok telegraphs every punch and stays open for attacks for quite a while so, if you don't anticipate your enemies moves, your attacks will be promptly interrupted by the enemies and they rarely miss an opportunity like that. Add to that an interesting cast of enemies that, while they aren't very varied, with just a few types of enemies, they are all very interesting to fight with. Giant rats called Squealers, robots, drones and even some NPCs that are part of the story will be among your enemies. They all have unique fighting styles and some will give you a lot of headaches sometimes.

You also can fight with Graff, Brok's step-son, from time to time. He's a cat and just a teenager and



as result he is way faster but weaker than Brok, playing more like a high technique character with lots of speed and agility. He has a slide move that can easily knock your enemies and can jump over their heads dealing a good amount of damage while avoiding being hit. Unfortunately, due to the story of the game, there are only a few times where you can play with him, giving the feeling that he was a little underused in the game, but understandable when you look at how he is placed in the story.

The A.I. of the enemies is generally good, they know how to evade your attacks and, as I mentioned before, they know how to take advantage of your mistakes. But if you are here mainly for combat, the better option is to put the game on hard mode. Normal is pretty easy and the A.I. is very forgiving, making each fight pretty mundane. On hardcore you will face a very mean set of enemies, that can kill you with easy and you will force you to use your block and dodge more than you expect in a beat 'em up. You will find some weapons around your fighting grounds, some are brought by the enemies but I found them to be pretty useless when compared to Brok's move. They are usually even slower than your regular moves and most of the time will let you open for attacks. The damage they provide is very good, but you will be lucky if you can finish a chain without being hit first. You can also

find items to regain energy, improve your strength and reduce damage taken for a while. Those can be found in boxes, dropped by enemies and can be used at any moment since most of them will be stored in your inventory after you pick them up. The game also offers a nicely Quick Fight mode where you can play with Brok or Graff, facing waves of random enemies each time you play. You can pick among 5 difficulty levels and it is pretty fun to play for a while or to test and try some combo sequence or even study in a controlled environment how your enemies behave.

In the end, for a point'n click game, the combat here is extremely satisfying. It is surprising to see combat that isn't supertial in a game that isn't sold as a beat 'em up. Even not being a traditional fast paced combat with lots of combos and aerial moves, the combat is great and feels great with every punch you land and every hit you take. What you have here fits perfectly to the general theme of the game. The slowness of the characters added to the weight of their moves holds well together with a giant croc, giant rats and human sized robots. It is a very good surprise seeing other genres of games embracing beat 'em up mechanics not only well, but with enough creativity to make something unique and very satisfying to play. ✨



CONCLUSION

Brok, The Investigator is far from a traditional beat 'em up. The game is heavy on story and puzzles because this is primarily a point'n click game. You will spend hours and hours here looking for clues, talking to suspects, solving family crisis and dealing with the consequences of a world on the brink of collapse. As a beat 'em up, Brok does an excellent job of what it has to offer. The fights aren't that frequent but when they happen they will be extremely satisfying and you will spend a good time during those fights to make up for it. If you like to exercise your brain, as much as your fingers, Brok is a no-brainer. The story, graphics, puzzles are all very well made and everything is combined perfectly here. One of the greatest surprises this year, Brok is a game that will stick with you long after you finish playing it.

Brok releases August 26 on Steam and GOG. Mac and console versions are coming later this year.



STEAM GAMES

Did You Know?

- Only 1 in 20 players actually writes a review.
- Reviews are crucial for the game success on Steam.
- If the game doesn't get at least 10 reviews, Steam pretends it does not exist.
- You don't need to write a complete review, just saying "It's good!" is more than enough.



So, don't waste any time, go to your Steam Library and review the games you love! That way, those games get more attention on Steam, sell more copies and the developers can continue to work on updates and new games.

#ReviewYourGames

How to Kickstart

UNDERLING UPRISING



Brawler's Alley talked to Mark and Lenny the developers of Underling Uprising, an upcoming Saturday morning cartoon inspired beat 'em up, about their successful campaign on Kikckstarter, inspirations for the game, challenges they and what are their next steps. Check it out!

BA - It's a pleasure to have you here with us in the Alley to chat about the game! Underling Uprising was recently funded on Kickstarter surpassing the initial goal and we have to congratulate you for the great campaign. Tell us, how did the idea of Saturday Morning Cartoon inspired beat 'em up?

DD - Thank you! We're super ecstatic that our game was funded! We're so looking forward to developing it!

We really wanted to make a beat 'em up for the gameplay aspects of the genre. We love to develop action games and Beat 'Em Ups are in the upper echelon for action. We wanted a theme to help us stick to, so we turned to what we knew best. Some of our most nostalgic memories

come from watching Saturday Morning Cartoons (Teen Titans, Dexter's Laboratory, Powerpuff Girls, etc.).

BA - What games inspired you guys to make U.U.? Are you avid beat 'em up players?

DD - Castle Crashers, Streets of Rage 4, Dungeon Fighter Online, all of the classic Capcom Beat Em' Ups, and many more. We love beat 'em ups! We have vivid memories of spending countless quarters on Beat 'Em Up arcade machines when we were kids. Way too much time was spent there!

BA - Your first game, Ninja Chowdown, was an infinite runner, another successful campaign at Kickstarter, what made you decide for a beat 'em up this time?

DD - We've always wanted to make a beat 'em up. We just weren't skilled enough before to do it. Now that we are more comfortable with the game



development process, this seems like a great time for us to create one.

BA - The game, Underling Uprising, uses a hand drawn art-style, why did you guys choose this style over the more tradicional pixel art?

DD - We've made pretty much all of our previous games using traditional pixel art, so we wanted to develop one using a different style this time around. Lenny actually had no experience with creating pixel art before we started making games as he



was more used to a hand drawn art-style. For him, this artstyle will be going back to what he is used to.

BA - U.U. have a very curious and innovative cast of characters, like a girl and her friendly ghost, a cyborg, a monkey and a gooey man, what were the inspiration for such characters?

DD - We began by spitballing ideas for character designs using very short descriptions. These were just really vague ideas that we thought could be cool. Some examples of other characters we didn't go through with are "DJ Magician" and "Psychic Office Worker". We probably had around 20 possible character ideas listed out, but we eventually whittled that number down to the 4 that are in the game.

BA - What can the player expect of those characters? Do they play very different from each other?

DD - Each character will play drastically different from each other. They will all have unique

move sets that come with their own strengths, weaknesses, and quirks. We want each playthrough with a character to feel like a completely new experience.

BA - And about the game? How many levels are planned and what the player can expect about replayability and extras?

DD - Currently, we have 7 standard levels planned. Each level will have their own sub areas to give even more diversity to the world that you will explore.

Par for the course of beat 'em ups, we hope for Underling Uprising to have plenty of replayability. We want the diverse set of characters to play a huge role in this. Each playthrough with a character will feel entirely new. A lot of our development will be heavily focused on making these characters fun to control and completely unique. The world will also have super cool secrets that you will likely miss on your first playthrough, but they will be needed to experience the full game.



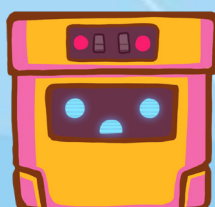
For players that love to replay a game for an extra challenge, we are also like that! There will be plenty in store for players who will want to challenge themselves repeatedly.

BA - We have around 20 beat 'em ups announced for this year and already something around 10 for the next. What makes Underling Uprising special?

DD - Our unique, lighthearted, and quirky designs. This will be very apparent with our diverse characters and colorful world. We want everything to be expressions of our own personalities so there will be plenty of experiences in the game that will be distinctly coming from our own minds.

BA - After two successful campaigns on Kickstarter you guys have a good experience with the platform. What tips can you share with new devs that want to kickstart their project?

DD - Start early. As soon as you have an idea that you want to do a Kickstarter, do research and start planning. Likely, there'll be more work that you have to do for the Kickstarter than you initially think. Having everything set up well before the actual launch of your campaign will be a huge benefit.





BA - What was the hardest part of the campaign?

DD - Developing the demo. While it isn't necessary for a Kickstarter campaign to have a demo, we really wanted to have one. We feel like it was a good way to engage with potential backers and show that we are serious about committing to this project.

BA - The campaign had a great start and it was almost backed in two weeks. Did you guys doubt it would reach its goal for any moment?

DD - We were fairly confident in reaching our goal after the first two weeks. As long as we kept up the pace, it was projected to meet the goal. There were a couple hitches that happened, but nothing too major. Naturally, during that time we were still a bit nervous that something terrible could happen, but fortunately, nothing did.

BA - Now that everything is backed and ready to go, what can we expect about the development of the game? (How long will we wait, new demo, which platforms/stores)

DD - We hope for the full game to be released in about a year. Based on our projected schedule, this is very doable, but of course development can be delayed by unforeseen events. We'll do our best to keep everyone updated if there are any major delays that happen. We're actually working on an update to the demo right now. This will include an expanded first level and the first boss. Our goal will be to release on Steam and Switch. We would love to release on other consoles, but we will have to see if it is possible for us to.

BA - What features for the current gen are you looking for? 4k? 60fps? Is the Nintendo Switch a Possibility?

DD - We're not too sure at the moment about console-specific features. We'll have to do more research into what is plausible and what would improve the game experience.

We will definitely be releasing a Nintendo Switch version. It's always been our dream to release a game on a console!

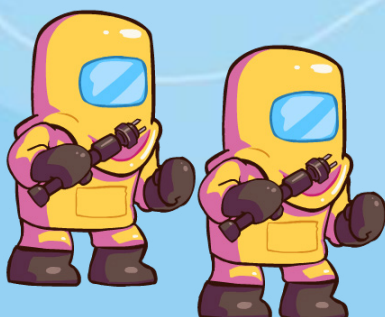


BA - Is a physical release in your plans? A collector's edition also would be neat. Any words about that?

DD - We would love to release a physical version, especially a collector's edition! Unfortunately, we will need to see if it is possible before we can commit to it.

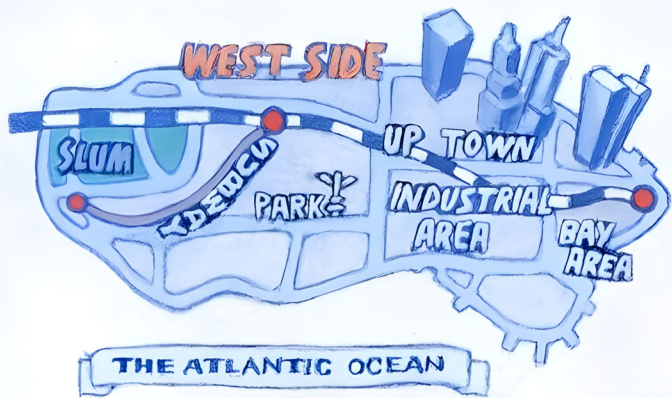
BA - Any final thoughts for our readers?

DD - We're sincerely humbled by the support we've received for Underling Uprising. We hope it will hold its own among other great and classic Beat 'Em Ups. Keep an eye out for the demo update and let us know what you think! We would love to improve the game in any ways possible! Cheers!



Dummy Dojo





River City Saga THREE KINGDOMS



The River City series is, undoubtedly, the oldest beat 'em up series still alive today. Since 1986, with Renegade, this series has always been popular in Japan, spawning multiple games and genres over 35 years. You can find sport games, competition games, RPGs and even mangas and a Television Series. An interesting thing about this series is that each and every game has beat 'em up mechanics in the mix.

STORY LINE

River City Saga: Three Kingdoms is the latest game in the series, being released in Japan last year and finally brought to the west this year. The game tells, with liberties, the story of The Three Kingdoms from China, a period around the year 200 of our era, where the country was divided and fought over by three dynasties. The story of the game is pretty big, which is expected since this is an RPG and you will follow the steps of Kunio, called Guan Yu in this game, as he faces the revolt of the Yellow Turbans, a real historic event, and try to free the land of Han (China) from these invaders.

The story spans throughout 6 chapters and will take around 10 to 15 hours to beat the game. If you enjoy games with long stories and with some realism, what you have here will certainly please you, since the story is enjoyable and watching the characters of the River City Saga playing roles in the game is pretty fun too but, if you are here for the gameplay only, you can quickly skip the story holding a button to skip all the dialogs. While carrying some realism, the story takes some liberties here and there to make things more lighthearted and funny and the charming characters can carry the scenes with ease, making the story, while extremely big for the beat 'em up crowd, interesting enough to follow.

GRAPHICS

While the story is big and pompous the graphics are not so much. I will say right now that the graphics aren't bad or anything but they are, for the most part, bland. The game world is fully in 3D, from the houses to the trees in the background, all was made using polygons and basic textures while the characters, weapons and items you will find in the game are all traditional 2D sprites. It is just like Contract Killer, which we reviewed in our last issue, with a z-depth applied to your character when he moves back and forth. It works pretty well, in my opinion, giving you a sense of depth that you don't see in fully 2D games.

The sprites are very well done, they have an 8bit aesthetic, with the traditional River City looks of squashed characters with their arms tucked in their bodies. If you enjoy this art style, it will be a joy for you to meet again so many characters from the series and meet newcomers to this style, like Kyoko and Misako. If not, there's not much else to save the graphics of the game for you here. Again, the graphics aren't bad, but they are not great either. You will have some moments of beauty here in there, specially inside cities, with carefully made houses, squares and palaces filling your



field of view, giving you a true eastern feeling. Some cities are fairly big and you will find yourself admiring the many details they put in each one of the assets. But when you leave the cities things are not so beautiful. Most of the places you will visit look a little bland and empty, with a few trees scattered in the backgrounds, plain and boring fields of crops and rock walls. There's nothing here, unfortunately, that will take your breath away and considering you will be visiting these places more than once in the game, some views and better background would help a lot here.



SOUNDS & MUSIC

One thing that will help you a lot while you spend your hours in this world is the music. If there's one thing I like to see in beat 'em ups are soundtracks that avoid the genre conventions and experiment with something else. In this case, the music has a lot of Chinese influences with string instruments and high pitch notes that will make you feel like you are in a distant part of China. They are, for the most part, happy and upbeat tunes that are extremely catchy and will make you whistle the songs as you play. What I find the most interesting here is that every region of the game has its own theme, so you'll know exactly where you are in the map just by listening to the music. Even the battle music, instead of some ominous and heavy beat, you will listen to a fun and happy melody that is hard to put in words. All we can say is that the soundtrack is very, very good and being something different, makes it all better to listen to.

Talking about the sound effects, if you played any River City before, you know what to expect. Arc keeps the sound as close to original as possible so you will be able to listen to modern renditions of 8 bits sounds that originated way back, in the beginnings of the series. They are harsh and dry sounds but if you are a fan of the series you won't have it in any other way. If you are not and this is your second, or first game of the series, it can sound a little odd for your ears. The punches, kicks and even jumps have that distinct NES fingerprint, making it sound extremely artificial and metallic.

You can say this is a River City game by listening to it and I am pretty sure that is the intention here. They created a sound fingerprint that will make you know the game is being played just by listening to it.

Unfortunately, and to be honest, expected, the game has no voice over. Since it is an JRPG at its core, the lack of voice overs can make the story a little tiresome. Reading through pages and pages of small texts, with no auto-scrolling and no color indication of who is speaking can be a little tiresome after a few hours of story. Voice overs, even if it was in english (although chinese would be perfect for authenticity purposes) would help a lot with the pace of the game and probably make the story even more interesting to follow.



GAMEPLAY

As always, for us fans of beat 'em ups, the meat of the game is in the combat, afterall, this is the reason we play these games, and what we have here is pretty good. First of all, this is not your typical beat 'em up, where you have your moveset ready from the beginning. This is a River City game so you will start off with only the basics here. A punch, a kick, a grab move, block and a jump that can be combined with a punch and a kick. It may be basic, but you can do a lot of damage with this initial moveset. It is pretty effective and the combination of these moves can be a powerful force.

However, this is a River City game so it won't be long until you get your first special move, the famous mach punch/kick that is a staple of the series. From there, you will be able to earn, buy or find an incredible amount of moves that can be equipped or unequipped throughout the game. Don't forget this is an JRPG so your moves are



never learned, they are equipments that you can change at will during your gameplay and even in on-going battles. Each one of your basic moves is an equipable slot, just like in a RPG. You have your punch, kick, jump and special slot.



Throughout the game you will earn moves that can be allocated to the correspondent ones. This will enable you to create any type of combo you want, making each character unique and, more important if you are playing with friends, complementary to each other. This feature extends beyond your set of moves and even each weapon of the game has many techniques to be used with it, so you not only can choose which kick is the best for you but also the way you handle an axe or a sword. This makes River City one of the most versatile games I ever play because you can change a character completely, to the point, if you want to mind you, where you have to learn how to play with your own character 3 or 4 hours down the road.



Did I mention you have 6 different specials? Yes, and I am not talking about 6 specials to choose from. You have 6 special slots that you can fill with different types of moves, 2 are linked to a traditional special bar below your energy and 4 will be linked to a huge orange fan in the middle of the screen. The bar below your energy will be filled every time you take a hit or do damage to your enemies, the one in the middle of the screen will only fill when you find a certain item that enemies drop when defeated. The first two you can activate with the block button and kick or punch, and the others with L and one of the face buttons. Those are extremely powerful moves that will clear your screen or even give a boss a lot of damage. Since this is an RPG you will be using some of these moves (special or not) to uncover secrets and reach some hidden

places in the map. This is a very fun idea that will put your brains to work while your fingers rest a little. In these places you can find special moves, stores, rare items and money that will help a lot in your journey.

You'll also have equipment like helmets, armors and gloves to improve your stats and give you an extra edge in the battles. These items can be bought, although they aren't cheap in the beginning of the game, or can be found or earned by doing quests for the various characters in the game.

COMBAT

This is all nice and well (and incredibly complex) but how is the combat? After all, this is a beat 'em up magazine and the combat is really what makes or breaks a game for us here.



If you played any River City game before you know how the combat works. You have a very tight combat, with fast and relentless enemies and you will be knocked down every few seconds. This series always had fast paced combat and here will be no different. Enemies come from all sides in huge numbers and they will pile up on you without a second thought. And are smart too, making excellent good use of the environment and weapons they found or bring with them. In some scenes it can be a little hard to keep track of what's happening and all you can see is your character being thrown left and right while you desperately wait for the momentary i-frame to counter the assault.

Talking about i-frames all your enemies will have the same chance as you have. Everytime you knock them all, even the most common of the minions,



will have a brief window of i-frames that they will happily use to their advantage. You can pick them up on the floor and throw them around to try to dispatch as fast as you can, but as soon as they get up you better look out or it will be your turn. This is a staple of the series so, if you are a veteran, there's nothing new here, but if this is your first try on the series, it is a good thing to keep in mind.



You'll find some great and extremely hard bosses ready to give you a lot of trouble if you don't come prepared, so be aware, some grind will be necessary in this game. You'll fight some familiar faces like Abobo, from Double Dragon, or Misuzu, more famous for her role in River City Girls, to less famous characters like the Dragon Twins Ryuichi and Ryuji. They all have particular movesets that can be a pain if you get hit and they are all, even the big ones, extremely fast and agile. There's no slow enemies in this game, from the attacks to the way everyone moves, everything is extremely fast.

Unfortunately, not everything is great here. The game, as I said before, is big, very big and most of its length is there just for the sake of being there. You'll have to do a lot of fetch quests to advance the plot with some of them being extremely unnecessary things like: Go to the city X and talk to the character Y, return here and talk to me so we can battle the Yellow Turban Army. Even with the fast travel, this can be really time consuming because you only spawn at the gates of the cities



and some places are quite big, taking half a minute or more of mindless walking to find someone, exchange a few lines and head back to where you were 4 minutes ago. It would be cool if you did this type of thing once in a while, but throughout the six chapters you will be walking up and down the map just to chat with some a couple dozen of times. You can have some fun fighting along the way or using this time to grind some money or experience, but after 10 hours of gameplay you will be probably fast traveling around looking for something new or exciting to do.

There are a few other things like it that slowly consumes your time adding extra minutes where you do nothing except click over the menus. Every new item or skill you buy, you can't auto equip making every new purchase a new visit to the inventory screen to equip what you bought. Skills are even worse. They come in books and you have to read the book to acquire the skill and then move to the skill screen to select and equip what you want. This may sound like I'm picking on the game, but trust me, after hours and hours playing it, these things become noticeable and some QoL improvements would be nice to speed things up. ✨



66

CONCLUSION

River City Saga: Three Kingdoms is obviously a RPG first and foremost, but it relies so much on beat em up mechanics, it would be a mistake not to cover this game. For a RPG, this is a simpler one, with a good story, based on real events and a small set of options to pick from. For a beat 'em up this is a huge game, with heavy emphasis on story and an incredibly diverse and engaging combat that offers the player an overwhelming amount of options. No matter if you are here for the RPG or the beat 'em up part of the game, the end result will be the same. A somewhat flawed experience, but with so much charm and variety that you will overlook its flaws and just enjoy the good things it offers. The game is available now on PC, Playstation and Nintendo Switch.



99



The most badass girls in all of River City are back and they brought some company. The sequel to the excellent game of 2019 will offer 6 playable characters, the girls, Rick, Kunio, Poovie, from River City Ransom: Underground, and Marion, the former damsel in distress from Double Dragon, which will be playable for the first time ever, a enhanced and revamped combat system, lots of aerial moves, a bigger city with new areas and even secret ones and, of course, a bunch of new enemies to face. We can also expect some cameos like in the last game and this writer hopes that Billy and Jimmy are playable this time around! The soundtrack is once again signed by Megan McDuffee so we can expect a lot of excellent tracks to rock your adventures. RGC 2 was set to be released this summer but was recently delayed to an “after the summer” date.



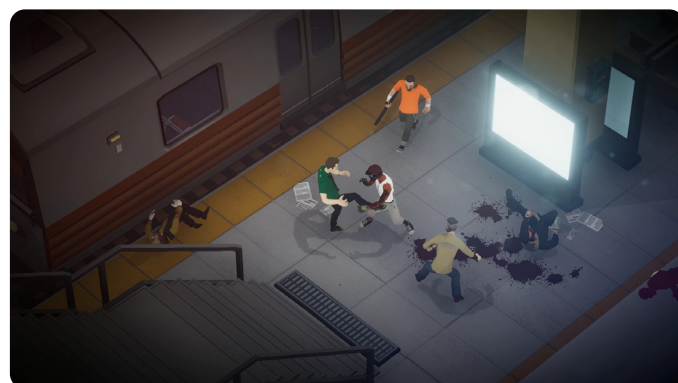
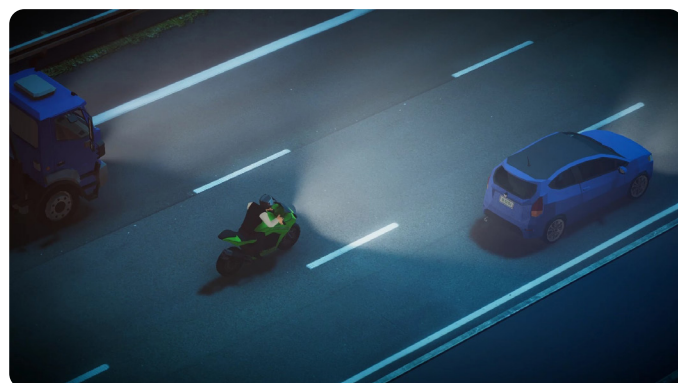


If you are looking for a new beat 'em up game but with a more classic flavor, look no more, *Fallen City Brawl*, from the newcomer developer *Fallen City Studio*, is exactly what you need. Featuring 4 playable characters and co-op for 2 players the game features huge sprites, a dark visual and heavy soundtrack which would fit perfectly at the arcades of the old days. The game is set to be released next year for PC but you can try a demo right now on Steam and check out this fun adventure of the four Divas.





It isn't everyday we see an isometric beat 'em up and it isn't everyday we see a game so brutal like Midnight Fight Express. This game is the creation of Jacob Dzwiniel and will put you in the shoes of Babyface, a sleeper agent controlled by an AI drone that wakes him up to prevent a massive criminal wave from taking over the city. Offering an amazing free-form combat, with lots of combos, interactive environments, an incredible amount of weapons, some RPG elements and an incredible amount of customizations, MFE is shaping up to be one of the most brutal and dynamic games this year. It's set to release on the 23rd of this month and we'll bring a full review in our next issue.



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Omg I need it!!



Big Retro Show @BigRetroShow · 29 de jun

I'm thoroughly impressed with the quality of this free magazine. Highly recommend everyone who loves beat 'em ups to check it out and show them some love!



Mike || Wishlist Fallen City Brawl @FallenCityBrawl · 24 de jun

Superb 1st issue of new #beatemup magazine @BrawlersAlley - free download and loads of 🔥 content in there. Thanks for including Fallen City Brawl and look forward to sharing more in a future issue :) Congrats @The_Flying_Kick and all involved! 🙌🌟



David Harvey

Excellent coverage as well guys!!! Well done!!! Very professional work!!!! 🙌🌟



Ron Groff

Very good, professional. I would sub to this if it was published physically or digitally.



Ronald Maya

This was awesome to read through. Good job, guys. Looking forward to the next one

THE SIMPSONS™



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